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## ATTAINABLE AIMS IN MODERN LANGUAGE TEACH- ING IN COLLEGES, OR, WHAT MAY WE SAFELY HOPE TO ACCOMPLISH IN MODERN LANGUAGE COURSES IN COLLEGE

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(Read before the N. Y. State M. L. A.)

WHATEVER be the different racial affinities or pedagogical creeds of those gathered here today, we can but be of one mind regarding the importance of our common calling. For, faced squarely by the needs of our time, it is only the distorted vision which does not look upon the teacher of the foreign spoken languages as a great high priest (or priestess) in the temple of modern learning. Never did the mission of showing others how to interpret tongues seem so exalted as at present, when the world, through ignorance and misunderstanding, lies almost prostrate before us. Never did it appear more clearly than today that the coming of the kingdom of harmony is dependent upon an international understanding of different modes of thought, as these are expressed by the different spoken languages.

The college lies midway between the school and the graduate department of the university. It may serve as a link between these two, continuing the work in modern languages begun at the school and preparing for graduate instruction. It may, also, complete the work of the school, or serve as the first stepping-stone to the graduate work of the university, and it may, finally, have its own isolated, individual existence, giving students their only scholastic instruction in modern language work. Whichever of these four be its function, the most important aim which can be attained in the modern language courses is the imparting of a love or enthusiasm for the language or languages being pursued.

I put this love for the subject ahead of method, ahead of matter, ahead of all else, since I believe with the Revised Version that "the greatest of these is love." With love for a language in one's heart, the road to attempting its conquest and all that goes with it becomes an easy one and one sure of being traveled. No person who has experienced what we may call linguistic pleasure at college will wish to cease his wanderings in linguistic paths after he leaves the college portals. Events in the last few years and closer world relations have brought a new zest to the subject of modern language study. Poor indeed or ill-prepared is the teacher of the modern foreign languages who cannot now awaken thrills of pleasure among college students. Teachers of German may think this an exaggerated statement in their case. But, remembering that the young Frenchwomen sent over by their government to study at our college both elected German at the start and that they both pursue this alien tongue with relish, I think the students who still take German in our colleges can be made to find much enjoyment in it.

The object of our modern language courses is to train the intellect and enrich the mind, thereby making better individuals and more useful citizens. That part of our work, therefore, which is most conducive to this end, must stand clearly in the foreground. This is, giving a reading knowledge of the language. A reading knowledge presupposes the training of the intellectual faculties, and it leads to the ends most important probably for the largest number of students in our college courses. For it unlocks the doors to all the thought expressed in written form in the new language, hence to what is termed the immediately practical, and also to general culture and to aesthetic pleasure. The imparting of a reading knowledge is the aim most universally and easily realized in colleges. Today, owing to the justifiable encroachment of aural and oral rights upon what was previously considered an ocular province, the reading matter is necessarily less in quantity than formerly. Not only, however, can students imbibe the thought without recourse to the mother-tongue, when they read by themselves, but their understanding of the subject matter can be tested in class by the correct and expressive rendering of the original. One of our attainable aims is to make attentive readers. We should arrange the reading matter progressively and not put in the classics too soon. This subject matter for read-

ing should include, as far as possible, "the literary expression of all the activities of modern civilized life." It is not necessary to turn the college into a trade school, but our reading courses during the first years can be made to give a thorough and general foundation both as to vocabulary and as to forms.

A most important aim is to bring the language we are teaching before our students as a living thing and something capable of immediate use. Whatever be the methods on which a good teacher bases his hope of salvation, this aim can be realized. Whether a stalwart and tried grammar be our leader, or the most ultra "Practical Course" ever published by a direct-method enthusiast, we can teach students to talk and to understand. They can from the first be led to think to some extent in the foreign language, if their ears are filled with the sounds and their eyes with the written forms. Even with a conservative grammar, the teacher can work up to the rules, letting the necessity for their application arise from the reading matter. And the assimilation of them can be induced by forcing their immediate use. A clear and thorough knowledge of the essentials of the grammar can thus be imparted. Our aim, it must always be remembered, is, not to stuff students with grammatical rules, but to develop in them the ability to use grammatical knowledge. One of the most effective ways of impressing grammatical principles upon students is to call constantly for a free reproduction of reading material. By trying to make use of the different forms, the students have these fixed upon their minds. Thus speaking and writing help to a correct reading knowledge, just as the latter aids in the two former. Nothing is so interesting and stimulating to foreign language classes as speaking and trying to understand. In an experience of twenty years at one university and one college, I have met few students who did not have some hunger and thirst for the living tongue, if they had any hunger and thirst for the tongue at all. The brief time allotted to classroom use can be best utilized by requiring much simultaneous recitation in elementary classes and by impressing upon every student the importance of reciting mentally with each person who recites audibly. Speaking and attempting to understand cultivate an alertness of mind, a quickness of memory and judgment, which reading does not call so much into play. Personally I believe in the use of the foreign tongue by both students and teacher as far as practicable from the very first. This involvet

the outlay of much energy on the part of the instructor, and is not adapted to one of sedentary habits in the classroom. But there is no joy quite so great for the teacher of a modern foreign language as carrying a class along in literature or history through the medium of the foreign tongue alone. And this elation is fully shared by responsive students.

It goes without saying that the extent to which college students become able to speak and understand a foreign tongue is relative, not absolute. The ordinary, interested young man or woman who is working with a live teacher can, when he begins a language in college and has at least three recitations a week, at the end of the first year understand simple sentences and form them himself. At the end of the second year, he can do this same thing more fluently and easily, managing some idioms and colloquial expressions. (If you will allow him to do it incorrectly, he will go much further than this.) The third year his ear and mind—I really should begin now to use the feminine form of the possessive pronoun, as that is more applicable in third-year college classes—*her* ear and mind become better attuned to the endings of the different tenses, her mind and tongue readier in the use of these. Darkness begins to disappear off the face of the modal deep. She can give outlines, stammer her views on abstract matters, ask questions in an original way, etc. And so on progressively through the later years. Of course, the natural linguist exceeds this program, the stupid student attains almost nothing of it. Constant use of the new language in intercourse between instructors and students, clubs, plays, etc., also attendance at the foreign church, if there is any in the vicinity, stimulate enthusiasm for the spoken tongue.

It has been my experience that, while college students rather delight in aural and oral work, they are not so keenly alive to the pleasures of written composition. This must be cultivated, not only for its own sake, but because precision and correctness in the use of a foreign tongue cannot be gained without it. And languages learned without being written are languages easily forgotten. When college presidents and deans realize the importance of free composition in the modern foreign language departments, we may have in each of these half as large a corps of composition teachers as now sit comfortably before their neatly arranged cubbyholes in English conference chambers. Until that day

arrives, we must struggle along as optimistically as possible, availing ourselves of all the *modos operandi* which twentieth century genius has invented for making less oppressive to both the party of the first part and the party of the second part mental exercises of a written nature in the foreign language. Students in small classes are easily treated. But with forty or more needy individuals waiting *en masse* to be transformed into masters of style in a foreign idiom, the problem is less simple. A plenitude of classroom blackboards, slips of paper passed daily for test sentences, personal attention, and no shirking or economy of eyesight on the part of the instructor, are important contributory factors to success in elementary classes. As the students advance, eternal vigilance must be the teacher's watchword. The flowery paths of literature would lure some away from the narrower, thorny path of composition. But the two roads must not be allowed to diverge very far, and a teacher's subtlety can often keep them close together. Even in the most advanced classes in literature, there can be not only outlines, reports, and original papers, but neverfailing demands upon students for original sentences containing new constructions or idioms similar to those just encountered in reading, and the like. Direct correspondence with interested foreigners is also a modern possibility.

Inculcating a correct pronunciation of the foreign language, especially of French, presents a greater problem to colleges than to schools. Students of collegiate age deem originality a virtue and are not desirous of branding themselves with the mark of servile imitators. Phonetics can be made to appeal, if presented skillfully and with moderation at the start. Feeding phonetics alone for the first six weeks to students who have but a year to devote to a foreign modern language is like giving a stone to them when they have asked bread. Here again vigilance must be the teacher's watchword, vigilance and common sense. A good pronunciation must be cultivated, whether it be by means of phonetic charts and symbols, by rules, by imitation, or by all combined. Let each college teacher, thoroughly equipped for any task, ask himself or herself the searching question, "What method or methods can I use most effectively?" and then press forward to success.

Our modern foreign language courses in college may be made to give students the grammatical insight which they cannot or do not derive from English; also to provide mental linguistic dis-

cipline for the many who do not study the dead tongues. A thorough grounding in the subtleties of the French subjunctive and the manifold delicacies of that language, towers of strength when correctly employed; or a study of the complex German case relations and the proper use of the German modal auxiliaries, will go far in cultivating a nice perception as well as the reasoning powers; and if the newer methods of teaching the modern foreign languages are employed, more versatility and creative ability can be gained by the student through them than through the ordinary college study of Latin and Greek. The smaller amount of translation now can be made, too, to teach expression and style.

Another attainable college aim in teaching a modern language is to make students intelligent regarding its origin. This involves recourse to history, anthropology, and phonetic science, as well as to other languages, thereby conducing to general intelligence and culture. This kind of work sometimes gives students seemingly without oral gifts a chance to shine.

The process of learning to read, speak, and understand a foreign tongue provides intellectual training, but the mind is enriched more particularly through exercising the newly acquired powers. The results thus obtained are in the case of students with precisely defined needs, as to read scientific works or to understand a technical lecture, too apparent to require special mention here. We are concerned more fully with results not so direct, with those that accrue through the study of general literature. Pure literature is not one of the practical things of the moment, but the age is not so materialistic that our young men and maidens do not care to penetrate into new literary treasure-houses. And as they stand in amazement before the French writers with their ripe criticism of life and great impersonal truths embodied in elegant expression; as they dream over the German romantic lyrics or follow the German drama in its expansive development; as they turn the pages of Italy's immortal epic, or sit absorbed before the Spanish novelists, they are growing in mental stature and increasing their knowledge of what constitutes life. With such rich inducements as we modern language teachers can offer, what opportunities we possess to woo and win hearts to a love for reading the literatures of other lands! What opportunities come to us also thereby to create an enthusiasm for the people whose ideals are embodied in the new literature, or, if not an enthusiasm, a toleration, at least. There is no other way in which we can so broaden a student's outlook and

enlarge his horizon. With interest in the new people, develops a growing knowledge of their country, their nature and customs, institutions, arts, intellectual life, and civilization in general. From the very first, books must be chosen which will bring the student into the new national atmosphere and environment. And as he progresses in his knowledge of the new peoples, as he beholds the visions which have been given them, new visions may spring up within his own soul. Every foreign literature contains elements of value to our own national life. It is recognition of this fact which causes sympathies to grow mellow and hearts to turn in brotherly kindness to the whole world. "The real, the true and simple" is, according to Madame Clémenceau-Jacquemaire, all in literature for which the returning soldier cares. It is not difficult to bring our students also to like this best.

A very important attainable aim of modern language instruction at college is the production of good teachers. The "majoring" system is in vogue at many institutions or some other system which renders specialization possible, so that students can have five or six years of work in a language. Pedagogical departments, with their often too exalted ideas of the potency of method, must be induced to work with us, and schools are willing at times to allow our students to enter as practice teachers. Let the idea dissipate like mist that less gray matter under the cranial bone is necessary for instructors in the living languages than for those of languages dead and almost buried. Let us teachers angle amicably and legitimately for bright, ingenious, and capable students. Then, having inducted into them all the knowledge possible, and having impressed upon them the best of our methods, let us send them forth, humble postulants for fame. If we have failed to show them that their training has only just begun, and that they are to neglect no opportunity of bettering their pronunciation of the foreign tongue, of increasing their knowledge of its grammar and literature, and of improving their methods, we have failed in a great attainable aim.

From the wording of our subject, as it appears at the head of this paper, the inference may be correctly drawn that we teachers of the modern foreign languages do not consider all our desirable aims capable of realization at the present time. I have tried to set forth here the general aims attainable today in college courses.

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